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PARIS FOR WALLER; LONDON FOR TSOU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/12/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: INITIAL EMBASSY EFFORTS TO PRESS SARG ON INCREASED
SECURITY IN WAKE OF ATTACK

REF: A. DAMASCUS 4441

[1](#)B. DAMASCUS 4588

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Michael Corbin, per 1.4 b,d.

[1](#)1. (S) Summary: In the wake of the September 12 attack on the Embassy, the Embassy has pressed the SARG through various channels for increased security for USG facilities in Damascus and for complete sharing of details of the SARG investigation into the attack. RSO has relied on informal contacts with a senior police commander to glean some information about the investigation and to enhance security at the Embassy. In the hours just after the attack, the SARG made a concerted effort at responsiveness, but remains unavailable at senior levels. Through his contacts, the RSO has obtained in an ad hoc manner significant SARG security enhancements for the Embassy (reported septel) but has received very little information on the investigation into the attack. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Following the September 12 attack on the U.S. Embassy, Embassy has used various channels to

-- demand heightened security for Americans and USG facilities in Damascus including the USG-sponsored Damascus Community School;

-- receive information on the SARG investigation into the attack; and

-- seek to increase channels for receiving threat information from the SARG on threats to the U.S. in Syria.

[1](#)3. (S) For background, Embassy security is provided by at least two security services: Syrian Military Intelligence and the Ministry of Interior. DAO has an official but limited relationship with SMI through its Foreign Liaison Office that is charged with oversight of foreign military attaches posted to Damascus. The RSO has a very informal personal relationship with a senior Interior general responsible for Embassy security. This channel continued despite SARG efforts to direct all Embassy's official contact with the SARG through the MFA after the recall of the Ambassador in February 2005. In the absence of an intelligence channel, any USG threat information desired to be passed to the SARG is passed by the Charge to the senior point of contact designated by the MFA for all Embassy business after the withdrawal of the Ambassador, Director of

Protocol Dr. Smadi. This has been a one-way channel in which the Charge has occasionally passed sensitive threat information, which Smadi committed to passing to the relevant security authorities. The Charge has not received substantive response from Smadi.

¶4. (S) In the hours just after the attack, the SARG made a concerted effort to demonstrate responsiveness. Charge met with Minister of Interior Bassam Abdelmajid outside of the Embassy immediately after the attack at the Minister's request. He promised complete security cooperation. Charge met the same day with Assistant Foreign Minister Arnous (the number three in the MFA and significantly senior to the protocol director) to request enhanced security, information about the attack, and underlined the responsibility of the SARG to provide threat info to the Embassy (reftel). (The MFA subsequently provided a point of contact in the MOI, who turned out to be junior to the RSO's informal POC.) However, as days have passed, the SARG seems to have attempted to return to a business-as-usual approach, rebuffing Charge's attempts to engage officials at more senior levels on attack-related issues.

¶5. (C) Through his contacts, the RSO has obtained in an ad hoc manner some security enhancements for the Embassy. These will be detailed septel but include the following: Five uniformed police guarding the embassy are now armed, a change from their pre-attack posture. Fifteen to twenty plainclothes police are now in the area (in addition to the normal SMI plainclothes contingents). Two motorcycle police are now preventing cars from stopping in front of the Embassy, in an effort to help secure al Mansour street, the main traffic artery that the Embassy fronts. RSO has requested extra police for the Embassy-affiliated Damascus Community School. The Charge pressed Arnous to close the

streets that surround the Embassy but was told that the SARG was "studying" such action but would try to increase security measures to control traffic. The Charge has attempted to follow up with Arnous on this issue and on the investigation but has been told that Arnous is not available.

¶6. (C) On the investigation, the RSO has unofficially been given limited information about the police investigation into the attack, including limited bio-data on the attackers. Charge and RSO have attempted to use RSO and other channels to hand over a copy of footage of the attack filmed by Embassy security cameras, in exchange for enhanced SARG cooperation on the investigation. At Charge's behest, DATTT tried a similar approach September 21, with his contact in the FLO office of SMI. So far, these efforts have not borne fruit.

¶7. (C) COMMENT: The SARG is taking steps to enhance Embassy security, but at the political level clearly has not made the decision to relax the controls on the Charge or to expand security cooperation. We will continue to press the SARG through our working-level contacts and use a security assessment team visit (ref B) to make a renewed push through the MFA.

CORBIN